

**A Book Review: *World Voices 2 English as a Lingua Franca*
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Abstract

Helping students overcome their anxiety and shyness when speaking in public is a challenge in the classroom. For Communication classes at Asia University my students focus on spoken English and presentations. Access to materials which are simple and easy to use and can act as a springboard to foster independent enquiry and presentations on any given topic is essential. From this viewpoint, *World Voices 2* is a valuable resource. The publishers Abax set out their mission statement as being an independent publisher born and shaped in Japan but with a world focus and with the goal of promoting English as a Lingua Franca (ELF). While ostensibly being a book which exposes students to non-native voices alongside native speakers, it does a good job of promoting the idea of English as a Global Language. The units are clearly scaffolded, the progression is well signposted and the design is intuitive so that it works very well as a presentation tool.

Overview

World Voices 2 is a four skills textbook in a series aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference (Council of Europe, 2011) from A1 (Beginner) to B2 (Upper Intermediate). It is the second book in the series and is aimed at A2 (Elementary) level students. I would suggest that both A1 and B1 (Intermediate) students could benefit from this book due to its well-balanced approach. The publisher Abax has a clear and easy to navigate website which has information in both English and Japanese and the style of each webpage is consistent. It is this consistency which extends to the physical textbook, and although not original in today's saturated multi-media-packaged book market, it is one of the main reasons why it is a wholly appropriate textbook for Japanese students who are being introduced to the concept of English as a Lingua Franca. One of the main positive outcomes is to observe English as the language of those who speak it with no cultural ownership of the spoken word.

The series concept and lead writer is a long-established Tokyo resident and is listed with three others as the authors of the book. It is fair to say the World Voices series is aimed primarily at Japanese students or at the very least students living and studying in Japan. From the outset the international flavour of the book is apparent with culture consultants and voice actors listed from eleven countries including Jamaica, Qatar, Mongolia, Albania and Ghana.

In an Introduction section the textbook outlines its approach with native and non-native speakers contributing to talks on a range of cultural differences around the world with a focus on natural English. The Student Book contains twelve units. Each unit is exactly six pages long. In addition, there are Speaking Practice sections, Reading Activities and Tapescripts which accompany each unit found at the back of the book. The Speaking Practice has pairwork activities consisting of Mini-Talks, Dictations, and Information Exchange. There is no dictionary and there are no tests.

The book costs ¥2,754 including tax. It is introduced to the student with a password for the audio which can be downloaded for free from the Abax website. The approach of the authors and the goals of the book to focus on Natural English to help students understand natural, native-speaker English are outlined. Immediately the non-native student can feel at ease knowing that they are in the majority of English speakers worldwide who use English as a Lingua Franca.

Contents

The Table of Contents is laid out over two pages in a symmetrical format with theme, ELF context, listening skill, grammar and language functions. The listening skill contents present A2 level appropriate skills regarding linking sounds, weak vowels, and disappearing sounds. The grammar sections are also level-appropriate going from both simple and progressive past to present to future tenses with modals among others. The language functions are presented in social and work-related settings and coupled with the non-native speaking talks stand out as particularly useful. It is this ELF Context section which is the book's unique selling point offering variance in accents and a decidedly non-American/Eurocentric view of culture. For students at the Elementary level it can be difficult to make out the English of native speakers (Cutrone: n.d.) and communication on the part of the listener can suffer as a result. Despite the native speaker fallacy putting native speaker English as superior to that of non-natives and the cultural and linguistic imperialism of English in various contexts (Phillipson, 1992), it is common to find anxiety in a classroom being taught by native speakers (Miyazato, 2002). It is also in keeping with global trends where native speakers are now in the minority in the English-speaking world. For non-native teachers who will use the book it is interesting to note that non-native teachers are becoming more commonplace and more suited to the task (Walkinshaw, I., Hoang Oanh, D., 2014).

Exercises

The exercises are listed according to letters A to N. This is a good contrast to the usual numbered series of exercises which can often seem robotic and informal. Each unit starts with warming up exercises with pairwork and the target vocabulary and grammar, followed by monologue and dialogue listening sets. The tracklisting is easy to follow with the track numbers clearly marked in red on each listening section. There is a Culture Note section which can be used to focus on similarities and differences between Japanese and other cultures. The topics range from the conventional such as morning routines and nicknames to the less frequently seen cold remedies. Speaking Practices follow and each unit culminates in a Poster Presentation, again with the standard range of A2 level-appropriate items. The presentations can be done in groups (the book recommends groups of three) or can be tailored by the instructor to be undertaken in larger groups. Solo presentations are possible. Students are encouraged to cut and paste photos or images from the internet for their two-minute

presentation.

There is also the option to draw freehand. This could be appealing to many Japanese students who have been shown to try and draw ideal faces and bodies and who perform highly on drawing tasks owing to the high volume of manga which students encounter in Japan (Toku, 2001, pp. 46-59). This is an exercise which may well lessen anxiety in students, and for Japanese students public speaking can indeed be a task filled with trepidation and as Japanese students score higher on trait social anxiety, they are even more concerned and hence less likely to risk using English in public (Brown, 2004, p. 8). I have found that students make extensive use of the board and creative solutions to illustrating difficult concepts.

Vygotsky (1978) posits that language development helps in the development of cognition and perception and via the carefully scaffolded instruction throughout each unit, the students reach their "zone of proximal development" at the final section and are ready to speak with confidence using the target language.

Extension

The arts naturally lend themselves to multicultural and visual teaching and learning, which enhance students' access to language acquisition and cross-cultural education. (The New York State Education Department Office of Bilingual Education and Foreign Languages Studies, 2010, p. 17). The presentation element can be made more engaging for audience members and more engaging as a task for the student by introducing a multi-media element. Presentations can be enhanced by the use of TikTok, Powerpoint, Spark or a host of at the time of writing in-vogue audio/video media applications. There is no accompanying video material either with the textbook or on the website and no pointers or links to possible related sources. This behooves the teacher to search out related material either as a homework exercise or as preparation for each individual lesson.

Teacher's Book

Nor are there links to related materials in the Teacher's Book. The password protected book is available free of charge from the Abax website and this is an excellent resource for stretched budgets. The introductory pages explain the goal of each section to be taught and include useful classroom management tips such as the need for students to be well spaced in

narrow classrooms in order to optimise listening activities (p.2). The sections are explained in English and directly translated into Japanese presupposing that teachers from a variety of backgrounds and experience will be using the textbook. From then on, the teacher's book is simply the student's book with the answers to tasks completed in red or blue font; there are no further commentaries or side notes apart from a brief explanatory bilingual note on the photos of cities, festivals and food on each of the chapter opening pages. For some sections such as the Culture Note where students compare their own culture with others, some hints at how to elicit responses or perhaps a relevant word bank would be practical additions. Once downloaded, the PDF format is very easy to navigate albeit with a minor issue in the first chapter whereby the pages are not aligned with the physical text's pages, for example page 6 in the text corresponding to page 8 on the PDF, page 10 of the text corresponding to page 12 pdf, page 11 to page 13 etc. By the second chapter the pages are aligned and chapter two starts again at page 12. However, this does not detract from the cohesiveness of the book as the standard A4 page size, and a clear and colourful typeface ensure the teacher has a mirror version of the book from which students are working. The A4 size also makes it very easy to photocopy. For the student it is a slim book making it easy to carry but one wonders how enthusiastic students are to read the text outside the classroom for instance while on the train or at a café. Perhaps copyright fears prevented the publishers from supplying a digital version of the text which could be accessed from smartphones or tablets.

Challenges

Another area where the onus is on teachers to further the material is in the presentation of some of the scenarios presented in the book. Students are offered rose-tinted versions of countries, culture and peoples' lives. A case in point: looking at Afghanistan on p. 120 we are introduced to Abdul Nassim from Kandahar who 'lives in a house with a floor covered in beautiful red carpets with a yard where they grow flowers'. The house is 'very comfortable and there is lots of space'. One wonders if this is an average portrayal of a boy growing up in Kandahar in 2019. There are similar sanitised stories from Uganda and Cambodia.

Coupled with the lush photographs from tropical paradises and fresh fruit and vegetable there is an almost Instagram-like feel to the photos and illustrations. We know that social media trends on Instagram and Facebook have influenced everything from the consumption of more salad (the colours show up well on one's Instagram feed) to the

negative effect on self-esteem (Farmer, L., Lee Y., Makwana B., Parkin S., 2018). Only Iran's problem with traffic and drivers' use of car plate blockers to circumvent CCTV's recognition of the number plate (p.126) is any way less than idyllic. Photographs evoke meanings and reflections as well as information and factual data (Cohen, L., Manion, L., Morrison, K., 2018, p. 530). Unfortunately, the polished and stock photographs offer little in the way of critique or balanced discussion if the focus is to be on exploring the various realities of culture and life in the countries portrayed. For the teacher they present a challenge to show accurate representations of life and culture outside Japan. These sections therefore offer an opportunity for extracurricular self-directed learning and learner autonomy as students can be encouraged to explore the less palatable realities of life in these countries and hopefully include them in their classwork and presentations.

Conclusion

Overall this is a high quality and fit for purpose textbook. It is a worthwhile addition to any A2 level course. It has an easy to comprehend interface, is comprehensive in its coverage of topics relevant to this level and is non-threatening in both its presentation and practice of the material. While not being groundbreaking in any of the subjects it covers, the material is presented in a colourful and engaging way. The subjects covered are standard and the basic methodology followed to lead the students towards being independent users of English who can give confident and reliable presentations is sound. Its focus on non-native speakers to give the talks and its advocacy of EFL is constructive and while not entirely innovative, it is a trend not found in many current textbooks.

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